The Virtual Arts and Life Magazine

reZ

july 2026

Blue
Boccaccio
Hax
Starling
Trilling
Kodaly
Caldwell
Liberty

CONTENTS

read *rez* Magazine online at http://rezmagazine.com

- **The Unknown Ex** Huckleberry Hax delivers a knockout with his short story involving a dose of deception and pixels.
- **Line Breaks** Julie Trilling pays a tribute to a mentor, James Scully, who made all the difference in her literary world.
- **Lost in an Ocean of Souls** Zati Kodaly and Consuela Caldwell join together to pen this stunning work.
- **USS Rez-8648: The Sand Surrenders** Art Blue takes us abord the USS Rez to the fourth moon of Betelgeuse.
- **Makizmo** Cat Boccaccio treats us once again to some of her signature micro fiction, and in it we can smell her fragrance.
- **Tanka Number Seven** We're delighted to showcase the seventh in Indigo Starling's series of romantic tankas.
- **The Spottled Egg** Shadow Liberty brings us haunting atmosphere in her lovely description of a very special egg.

About the Cover: It's been a long time since we've thought long and hard about Besty Ross, the seamstress who stiched the first flag of this revolutionary republic. But on the 250th anniversary of the birth of this experiment in democracy, we feature her humble contribution to the world. With liberty and justice for all.

"And those who were
dancing were thought
to be insane by those who
could not hear the music."

Friedrich Nietzsche

The Unknown E

Huckleberry Hax

Photo by A3g158

CX

"Indigo Williams!?" the man on the laptop exclaimed, "Oh my God! Indi! How the hell are you?!"

We'd just completed the usual introductions for the latest of our dining club virtual guests. Ento Bringham was a fifty-something man from the States with a round face and a receding hairline. Wherever he was in the US, it appeared to be somewhere a good deal warmer and sunnier than the UK's dark November bluster: behind him was a view of blue skies and gently swaying palm trees. Meanwhile, outside the little cocoon of brightness that was L'Albero Verde, the Italian restaurant we used for our monthly get-togethers, rain lashed relentlessly against the windows.

It was Jennifer Bit's turn to bring the guest to our meal this month and she'd promised "an honest-to-goodness virtual world creator" for us to chat with "and absolutely no mystery to solve." Edward, our sixty-something club founder, had nodded his approval at this.

"Um," said Indigo Williams, a club owner and skin designer inworld, "I'm… fine? Actually, I'm not fine. My club is attracting so few people now that I'm seriously thinking of closing it. But since you likely weren't actually requiring a detailed response then let's settle on 'fine'. I'm alive. I'm healthy. I'm fine."

There were expressions of concern from all around the table. Across from me, Vanilla Sharp - my virtual and real-world girlfriend - said, "I'm so sorry, Indi. I know how much that place means to you. Didn't Helena work out?" Helena Hollander, our virtual guest from four months ago, had assumed co-ownership of the club earlier in the year. Indigo had told us previously how she was breathing new life into the establishment.

"Oh, Helena's amazing," Indigo said. "That's what makes this all so hard: she's been working tirelessly on events. The hours she puts in amazes me. But the honest truth is that nothing she's done seems to have reversed the steady flow of people leaving. Honestly, I think the days of community in the metaverse have come to an end. People just flock temporarily around new shiny stuff now."

Enrico, our tireless waiter, arrived at our table to hand out the menus. Meanwhile, the man on the laptop cried out, a little indignantly, "Indi! It's me! Ento!"

A look of irritation came across Indigo's face. "Yeah… I did listen when Jennifer told us your name. I'm

sorry… have we met?"

"Have we met?!" Ento said, incredulously. "Um… yes?! We, um, dated for five months earlier in the year?!"

"So… that's not true," Indigo told us. "For one thing, that's two months longer than my permitted dating limit."

"You have a dating limit?" Jennifer asked.

"Everyone should have a metaverse dating limit," she told us. "Try it. You'll never look back. I always raise the subject of it at the start of a second date. Which Ento here would know if he and I had actually been out."

"Actually, I remember that conversation well," Ento said, unfazed. "I agreed to the limit. Well, you didn't give me much choice in the matter. I believe your wording was something like, 'Believe me, it's highly unlikely you'll last as long as three months, so don't worry about it.'"

Indigo looked up from her menu and frowned. "That is… exactly what I say. Are you an alt of someone I know?"

"Um… no. I'm Ento. You used to call me 'Ento without the B.' Seriously? You've forgotten me completely?!"

"Well this is weird," Mary-Anne Middlemarch muttered.

"So much for 'absolutely no mystery'" Vanilla added.

"One of them is clearly lying," said Raw concrete, our youngest member, who was sitting as usual to my left. "My money's on Indi."

"My money's on you wearing your gigantic pizza this evening before it gets anywhere near your mouth," Indigo replied sharply.

"Another possibility," Edward said quickly, "is that there has been some deception involved. As we know, it isn't an impossible task to make one avatar appear identical to another - right down to its name."

"Right," I said, "Like that guy we heard about last year who seemed to be in two places at once. What was his name?"

"Bill," Jennifer said, looking a little crestfallen that her promise of no mystery had broken apart so quickly.

"That's right. Two identical-looking and identically named avatars: one with their name spelled with two lower case Ls and one with their name spelled with two upper-case Is. The exact same trick could be pulled off

with your name, Indigo."

A look of complete confusion had come across Ento's face. "Are you being serious Indi? You really don't remember me?"

"I don't remember you because we never met," Indigo replied. "Well, possibly we met - I have no idea - but we never dated. That I would remember."

"You're suggesting that… someone pretended to be you with me?"

"No, Edward's suggesting that. I'm not yet convinced you're not making this whole thing up."

"Ento's a really good avatar animator, Leonard," Jennifer said to me, making one last attempt at the conversation she'd clearly been hoping would take place. "I was thinking maybe he might be able to help out with your movie thing."

"But… but…" Ento appeared lost for words. "This is five months of my life we're talking about. You were… well, you were everything to me."

"Easy way to check," Raw said. "Just bring up your logs and paste her name into a serif font. That'll show you if she was faking."

Our laptop guest stared at us uncomprehending for a moment as he tried to process everything, then he nodded and seemed to understand. "Right… right… yes… I'll do that now." His gaze altered as he started opening windows on his computer.

"Why three months?" Vanilla asked Indigo whilst he worked. Indigo shrugged. "It seemed like a good number. Things usually sour not long after that point, so why wait? I'm not saying I won't break that rule if I ever meet 'The One,' but if I'm not feeling it once three months have passed then the fun part's pretty much over and hanging on's just wasting valuable life." She glanced at me and then back to Vanilla. "What are you guys at now?"

"Six months," I said quietly.

"Aww, that's sweet," she told me. To Vanilla, she added, "I take it you don't, uh, have any sort of agreement?"

"No!" Vanilla cried in reply; I was gratified by the slight edge of horror to her voice.

Ento looked back at us. His face seemed to have paled in the last few seconds. "My God, you're right! It was in your surname. One of the two Ls in 'Williams is an upper-case I."

I wonder why she did that rather than making the I in Indigo a lower-case L," Raw mused.

"That would have messed up where her name appeared in the friends list," I pointed out. "The list is ordered alphabetically by first name, so the name starting with an L would have been an obvious giveaway."

"So then," Edward said, "the actual mystery here is not how they did it, but why. Though we do know a couple of things at this point."

"We do?" asked Indigo.

significant."

Indigo handed her menu back to Enrico, as he discreetly collected orders. "Assuming that this is actually something that happened," she said, "isn't the most likely explanation here that they're someone Ento knows and they pretended to be me because they knew that Ento had the hots for me but not for them?"

"So poetically put," Mary-Anne commented.

"It's actually this short of scientific fact," Indigo replied, holding her finger and thumb an inch apart. "If you saw my avatar inworld then you would have the hots for me."

"The virtual world is that one place, after all, where it is actually possible for you to become the person you are jealous of," Jennifer said.

"Well, we know that whoever it was who was imitating you must have known you pretty well," I said to her. "How else would they have known about your three-month rule?"

"Indeed," Edward agreed. "And we also know that, despite their knowledge of this rule and their stated intention to adhere to it, they nonetheless exceed it by two months. That strikes me as potentially very

"The virtual world is that one place, after all, where it is actually possible for you to become the person you're jealous of," Jennifer said.

"You make it sound like that's a regular thing," Vanilla commented. "There are actually people in the

metaverse who just enjoy having, you know, a normal relationship."

"There are actually people in the metaverse who just enjoy having no relationship," Raw muttered. Edward patted the young man's hand and said to him, "Quite right, my boy; quite right."

"What the hell is 'normal' in the virtual world anyway?" Jennifer asked, looking slightly irritated by Vanilla's remark.

"Amen to that," remarked Indigo as she snapped a breadstick.

"But if this mystery person was jealous of how you looked," I asked, "then why not just copy the look? It's not like people don't all the time attend to what others are wearing in the metaverse. My God, the endless fashion blogs!" I remembered at that moment that both Jennifer and Mary-Anne maintained such blogs and added, looking nervously at one and then the other, "Some of which are excellent, of course!"

"Hopeless," Indigo said, shaking her head.

"My point is, why go to all the trouble of faking your name?"

"I don't know what you want me to say, dude," she replied. "I guess I must be greater than the sum of my parts."

"But this is all beside the point," Ento blurted out from the laptop. "I'd never met Indi before we started dating. I'd never even heard of her. Well, I'd heard of Indigo Skins, of course, but that was just a brand name to me. So you see: no-one could possibly have been jealous of me having feelings for her."

Indigo said to him, "Can you stop saying you dated me? Can we allocate a token name to this alleged mystery person that doesn't happen to be mine?"

"I suppose she's still technically Ento's ex," Raw said, "so maybe we should call her X?"

"Ok fine. X it is. Why don't we start at the beginning? Where did you meet X? How did you start dating?"

"It was in March," Ento said. "We - that is to say, X and I - were at the Smugglers' Ball - you know, at the annual Maritime Faire."

"I was at that event!" Mary-Anne cried. "That enormous woman avatar was there in a pirate outfit!"

"That's right," said Ento. "There must have been at least a couple of hundred

people there across the two regions the event was held in. The lag, of course, was dreadful."

"Ugh, lag," commented Vanilla. Everyone nodded.

"Well it's one of the metaverse's biggest independent annual events," said Jennifer. "Loads of brand owners attend. It's a real Who's Who of the virtual world."

"I always make an effort to attend for that very reason," said Ento. "More than once I've picked up work as a result of a conversation with a furniture creator there."

"Not really my sort of thing," said Indigo. "I've been a couple of times, but it always ends up irritating me: so much work goes into the visuals of that event only for no-one to see any of it because they've all reduced their render distance down to five metres and focused on a rock in the ground in order to get their frame rate above one FPS."

"You need to learn to lean into that irony," Jennifer told her. "I especially enjoy the lengths people go to to dress up for the occasion, only to display as naked for the first half hour because their clothes haven't yet rendered."

Ento continued. "So out of the blue, Indi - I mean X - sent me a private message asking about my work. Bringhamations isn't really a well-known brand - I don't have a store or anything because - well - I'm just not into that sort of thing. Too much hassle. I just create bespoke animations for clients. On that particular occasion I was up to my eyes in work and I wasn't really looking for any new commissions; I just went to the ball that time out of habit. But of course I was curious to see who was messaging me so I cammed over to look. And when I saw her…" Ento paused and reddened slightly. "Well, let's just say there was no way I was closing that conversation down."

"Told you," said Indi.

"We don't actually know that this avatar visually resembled your avatar," Mary-Anne pointed out.

"They've clearly done their research on me. I think we can assume visual resemblance has taken place here."

"In fairness," Ento told us, "I did comment that there was, well, a waiting list. But I didn't want to come across as unenthusiastic, so I offered to show her some of my work at a time of her choosing. And, um, she chose that moment."

"Ento's work is incredible," Jennifer

told us. “The movement’s so fluid you would never know it’s not motion capture. Honestly, I don’t know how he does it.”

“I’ve always loved frame-by-frame animation,” our guest explained. “When I was a child, I’d make up those little flip books. I’d spend hours on them. Somehow, I can see movement in a way that others apparently don’t.”

“I don’t think we need to hear the full details, Ento,” Edward interjected quickly. “The outcome of the liaison is perfectly understood. I take it, then, that this constituted the first date and that it was at your subsequent meeting that the three month rule was communicated.”

“We met the following day,” Ento said. “That’s when she told me about the

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Indigo said impatiently. “When you say you showed her your work I think we can assume you don’t mean a professional presentation.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Indigo said impatiently. “When you say you showed her your work I think we can assume you don’t mean a professional presentation.”

Our virtual guest coughed. “Well my work does include adult animation, yes. Let’s be fair here: that genre occupies a fair share of the animation market; what metaverse animator can afford to ignore it? And, naturally, couples animations can only be evaluated properly when they’re being, well, used. Of course, initially we kept our clothes on but then one thing led-”

rule. We then conducted a, um, rigorous audit of some more of my previous work. I’d thought nothing could top the previous evening, but boy oh boy was I wrong.”

“Sounds like quite a whirlwind,” Vanilla said.

“Over those two days it was, yes,” Ento replied. But, see, Indi - I mean X - is in the UK like you guys; I’m in Hawaii, so that’s a ten hour time difference. So it was only really at weekends that we managed subsequently to see each other.”

“Interesting,” I said. “That five months suddenly shrinks significantly.” Edward nodded.

“So that must be why X extended the period,” Mary-Anne said. “Three months’ worth of weekends clearly wasn’t enough for the ‘fun part’ to be over.”

“Except X citing the three-month rule was surely only part of her disguise as Indi,” I pointed out. “Just because she set that condition doesn’t mean that it actually meant anything to her personally or that she really intended to keep to it.”

“Then again,” Indigo countered, “maybe they realised just what a superb rule it is.”

“What rationale did she give for extending the rule?” Jennifer asked.

Ento shrugged. “It was pretty much exactly as you just put it: three months wasn’t long enough when it was weekends only. She gave me two ‘formal extensions’ as she called them. But then we were at five months and she called time on the whole thing. I won’t deny it, I felt pretty devastated. Still, a deal’s a deal. We ‘shook hands,’ so to speak, and I never heard from her again.”

“What I don’t understand,” said Mary-Anne, “is how X never got found out before today. You must have gone to places together. People must have seen you. What about her club? Didn’t Indi’s regulars comment on you being together?”

“What regulars?” Indigo muttered.

“But this was back in the spring. You still had regulars then, right?”

“We never went to her club, for that exact reason,” Ento explained. “She didn’t even try to conceal it. She said she didn’t want people gossiping about us, and anyway that was business and I was pleasure.”

“You weren’t tempted to sneak over and take a look for yourself during the weekdays when she wasn’t on?” Mary-Anne persisted. “I would have been over there like a shot if it was me!”

Ento thought back. “I didn’t, no. To be honest, it’s not the sort of thing I would have done - I was having too much fun with her to care about any of that - if she didn’t want me going over there then that was fine by me. But now that you mention it, I do recall her saying she had a greeter script installed that would tell her if I’d been there. She said it in a joking way and I didn’t think anything of it at the time, but thinking about it now I guess that was her way of making sure I didn’t get

tempted to make a visit."

"I do actually have a greeter script," Indigo told us. I could configure it to keep records of who's visited, but to be honest I don't really care about looking over that sort of data. I'm not even sure that it's legal to keep it these days: people should be able to go where they want without others keeping records of it. But if you'd visited then you would indeed have seen a greeting message, and I suppose that would have reinforced what she'd told you."

"But you still went places together, right?" Mary-Anne insisted. "People would have seen you somewhere?"

"What of it?" Indigo asked. "I go to places. I dance with different dudes. I'm not partnered to anyone, so there's no-one's name in my profile for those busybody do-gooders to get all bothered about. Who would care?"

"I really hate those busybodies," Vanilla said. "Poor Leonard got a message from one of them just a couple of weeks ago because I dared to sit on the same park bench as a guy I've been friends with for years inworld. 'Did you know your woman is doing couples poses with a guy called Parker Bowling?' it said. What I'd do to that guy if I could meet him in real life…"

"

I just replied, 'And?'" I told them. Vanilla beamed at me, proudly.

Mary-Anne was not to be put off. "But what if they spoke to X, thinking it was you Indi?" she asked.

"Again," Indigo replied, "so what? If I ever see someone I know well when I'm out and about then maybe they'll say hi in public chat and I'll say hi back. If they have something specific to say then they'll private message me. X could have done both of those things in my place. No-one would be any the wiser."

"But wouldn't they be able to tell it wasn't you if they messaged X and she replied?"

Indigo shrugged. "We all experience those replies from time to time that tell us - without actually telling us - that the other person is busy or distracted or partially AFK. If I was X and I got a direct message from someone then I'd just send out a couple of those sorts of noncommittal comments - a 'lol' here, a 'hehe' there - making sure that I waited at least a minute before typing anything, of course. They'd soon realise I was busy and wouldn't pursue the conversation any further. Job done."

"Here's a thought," Jennifer said to Ento. "How did X know you weren't

already friends with Indi?"

"She didn't," our guest replied. "It's not like she could have asked me, right? I guess that was just a risk she was prepared to take."

"If I were in X's position and I was worried about that possibility," I said, "I'd open with something like, 'Hey Ento.' That's a perfectly acceptable greeting for both someone you know and someone you're messaging for the first time. I'd see how they replied to that. If they answered with 'Hey Indi' then that would suggest they were someone they knew. If they replied with 'Hey Indigo" then possibly not. And then I'd follow that up with, "How are you?" - again, perfectly acceptable for both someone you know and someone you don't know. Each vague remark would make it more likely that a friend would reveal themselves in some way."

"But you said that X messaged you to ask about your work," Mary-Anne said.

"Well yes," Ento replied. "But that wasn't the very first thing she said to me. It was actually just as Leonard described it - a few vague pleasantries before getting down to business." He frowned. "Funny how these pieces are all coming together now - things that were right in front of me and it never occurred to me that they had meaning."

"Ok, fine," said Mary-Anne. "But one thing X couldn't control is Ento talking to other people about her. Don't guys like to boast about their new girlfriends? What if one of those people Ento spoke to was someone who knew the real Indi?"

"But isn't that one of the reasons why she issued the three-day rule?" I asked. "By the time she said that - the second date - she must have long ago worked out that Ento didn't know Indi, so why continue to mimic her? Surely this was so that, if he talked to anyone who knew her, they would recognise her from his description."

"This is all very interesting, I'm sure," said Indigo, "but none of this brings us any closer to the why. All it is is further detail on the how."

"Well we're pretty sure that X must know you, Indi," Vanilla said. "So this must surely be something about you. X must be trying to get at you in some way."

"By dating someone Indi's never even heard of?" Jennifer said. "That makes no sense."

"We don't actually know for certain that they do definitely know Indi," I said. We've inferred that from X

knowing about her three-month policy and a line that she uses on the second date. Everything else she could have got from simply observing her."

"On that note," Indigo said, "there's a point I should probably raise. My apologies, Ento - you do seem to be a nice guy and this might be about to further erode your memory of your relationship. That line you cited - 'it's highly unlikely you'll last as long as three months, so don't worry about it' - I do use that line - and variants of it - but I only do so with my actual dates. My friends know about my three-month policy, but it's only the guys I date who get to hear that specific line…"

"X is a man!" Raw blurted out, in an instant undoing the delicacy of Indigo's careful wording. She glared at the young builder and then looked back at the screen. "I mean, it's possible of course that one of those men talked to a woman about what I said, but if we balance out the probabilities here…"

Ento sighed. "To be honest, the idea that they were deceiving me in the first place is what troubles me the most. If it was a guy and they were actually into me then I could live with that far easier than the idea that it was a woman and they were playing me. And it does very much sound like they were playing me."

Indigo smiled at him. "Good man," she said.

"Why do you say that?" Edward asked suddenly. "Why do you say that it sounds like they were playing you?"

"Well it's all starting to feel so… calculated," Ento replied.

Our white-haired host nodded. "So if we consider that opening communication to have been a calculated affair, let's consider the comments X made within it about your animation work. You mentioned only that she asked you about this work, but you then went on to say how you weren't really in a position to take on new commissions. Can we assume, then, that X wanted you to do some animation work for them?"

"Oh yes," Ento replied. "She did. I mean they did. Sorry, I should have made that clearer."

"And was that the extent of their inquiry or did they return to this topic later?"

"Very much they returned to it. X wanted animations for a sofa. After that first weekend, they asked if I might be able to fit the work in. I said yes of course - by then, I was hooked

on her, I mean on him. On them. But it turned out to be quite a bit of work. At first, they wanted me to just re-use animations I'd already made, but - as I explained to her - to them - I can't just give away animations I made for a specific client. They've paid me for exclusivity."

Jennifer said to us all, "For whatever reason, X was presenting as female. Can we just go for the moment with female pronouns?" We all nodded at this idea, somewhat relieved.

"So the reason X went for Ento is simple then," I stated. "She needed an animator and Ento is an animator."

"But what does that have to do with Indi?" Vanilla asked.

"Does it have to have anything to do with her?" I replied. "She just happened to be wearing her Indi alt when she spotted Ento. Maybe her whole Indi plan is something else altogether."

"This is all going to help me sleep so well tonight," Indigo muttered.

"Why not just buy off-the-shelf animations from the market place?" Mary-Anne asked. "Why did she need something bespoke?"

"She wanted something good!" Ento exclaimed. "Market place stuff is incredibly hit-or-miss. Trialling it can take forever, especially when you have to buy the animation first to see whether it's any good or not. My service frees up clients from having to waste time on any of that."

"You mentioned that it was quite a bit of work," said Edward. "If you don't mind me asking, dear fellow, how long did it take you to complete?"

Ento started to speak and then went quiet for a moment. He smiled sadly to himself, then he told us, "It took me just under five months."

A sigh of understanding went around the table.

"Like I said, it was right there in front of me all along."

"Don't be hard on yourself," said Indigo. "You were accepting what she said in good faith, like a decent human being."

"So the reason she went over the three-month limit was that she was waiting for you to complete the animations," I said, probably unnecessarily. "Still, though, none of this would appear to have anything to do with Indi."

"You said that she wanted the animations for a sofa," Edward said.

“It was an all-permissions couch she’d bought from the marketplace,” Ento told us. “Nothing special, but she wanted the animations to be fabulous, she said.”

“Do you have a picture of it, by any chance?”

“Um.” Ento thought for a moment. “Yes, actually, I think I do. Let me see if I can find it.” His gaze altered as he started clicking on things.

“A hunch, Edward?” I asked.

“A hunch, dear fellow,” Edward confirmed.

A picture of a sofa appeared on the laptop screen; however, the sofa was not alone. Two undressed avatars on the sofa were enjoying a shared cigarette.

“Whoa,” Raw said. “We did not need to see that.”

Ento apologised. “I’m afraid that’s the tamest picture in the, um, set.”

“So first things first,” said Indigo. “Visual resemblance confirmed: that is totally my avatar - circa about twelve months ago. Second, I have that exact sofa in my club.”

“A picture of a sofa appeared on the laptop screen; however, the sofa was not alone. Two undressed avatars on the sofa were enjoying a shared cigarette.

“Here we go,” Ento said to himself. Now… how do I show it to you?”

“Click on the ‘share screen’ button,” Raw told him.

“Share screen… share screen… ah yes, there…”

“I did wonder if that might be the case,” said Edward.

“Third: Ento, you and I need to have a discussion outside of this conversation about proportions.”

Ento coughed and removed the image from the screen. “Duly noted.”

I rubbed my head in frustration. “But what does this mean? So it’s the same sofa that Indi uses… so what?!”

“Do you allow guests to rez items at the club?” Edward asked.

“Actually, we do, yeah. It’s a thing. I have loads of spare capacity and it’s fun sometimes to see what guests lay out there. Helena does a purge every week of any items that don’t belong to either her or me.”

“So a sofa that apparently belongs to ‘Indigo Williams’ would make it past this purge.”

“I guess it would, yes.” She waved her finger slowly at the screen, “You know… now that I think about it, I do recall noticing that Helena had rezzed an extra copy of that sofa in one of the corners. That was back in… September I think? Around about then.”

“You didn’t ask her about it?” Mary-Anne asked.

“It’s her club as much as it’s mine now. She’s always fiddling with stuff. I like that. Anyway, the sofa looked good there.”

“And I suppose when she noticed the sofa she similarly assumed it was you who’d put it there,” Jennifer said. “You each assumed the other was responsible for it.”

“So X rezzes a sofa in the club that appears to belong to Indi,” I said. “I’m sorry, but I still don’t get it.”

“We know that the sofa contains Ento’s fabulous animations,” Edward said. “These are no doubt the honey in this particular trap. But what we don’t know is what else the sofa contains.”

Raw looked suddenly interested. “A spying script?”

“But spying on what?!” I protested. “Club chat? What value would there be in that?”

Edward sat back. “Imagine,” he began, “that I also have an avatar account with a name that looks like yours, Indigo. Using this account, I set up a sofa just like X has done and then I add to it a script which logs the names of anyone who uses it.” He looked at Indigo. “Let’s call this script, the ‘busybody script.’ The script looks these people up to see if they have partners and, if so, compares each person’s partner name to the name of the person they were actually sitting with. If these names are different it then sends a set message from my avatar to the partner: just like the message you received about Vanilla, Leonard. To be extra careful, it also sends a similar message to the person who was on the sofa.

Why do I do this? Because at least one of those people is likely to contact me in anger, and that way all they'll have to do is reply to my original message rather than look up your name - which, if they did that, would send their message to you rather than to me, thereby alerting you to my scheme.

"Now tell me, my dear," Edward asked, "what sort of impact do you think that might have on your visitor numbers over time?"

Indigo paled suddenly. Her wine glass froze halfway to her lips. "Bloody hell," she said. "There we have it. The mystery of my dwindling visitors solved. People think I'm a busybody."

"Well, it's just a hypothesis," Edward said.

"I even have a pretty good idea who X is. Pawkin Farley. He and I were dating at the time my avatar looked like that, and he was setting up his own place - Pawkin's Pub. I went there a couple of months back. Half of the stuff there is furniture I use at my place."

"Some people only know how to copy and steal from others," Vanilla said angrily.

Ento sighed. "I'm really sorry for the part I've played in this, Indi."

"You weren't to blame," she told him. "And I'm sorry if I was hard on you earlier. I'm glad to have learned about this. Pawkin has no idea what's about to come his way!"

He smiled. "For what it's worth, fake Indi has nothing on the real one."

"You know, you do seem like a lovely guy, Ento. You might not have been dating the real Indigo Williams before, but, if you're interested, the real Indi might like to date you now."

Ento gulped. "I am definitely interested," he said.

"Though there is this one rule I have," she told him.

· r —— e —— z ·

Bio: Huckleberry Hax is a writer and Second Life machinima creator. His written work includes novels set in and around SL, short stories and poetry. His 'Avatar Dining Club Mysteries' stories have been turned into a podcast, available at

https://tinyurl.com/avatardiningclub

His machinima includes the feature-length films STÖMOL and WAARHEID, and the drama series HOTEL VICTORIA. Website: huckleberryhax.wordpress.com

TERPSICORPS ARTWERKS

r — e — z

Line Breaks

(for James Scully 1937-2020)

Julie Trilling

Your roots are sunk deep,
sticky tendrils woven into
the damp moss
and wet red leaves.

Planted four decades ago,
watered, tended and
fed with fierce indignation --
waiting to push
verdant sprouts
through moist soil.

What remains
but the memory
of you
and that green
felt-tipped pen,
revising poems
I offered each week.

Your plastic scalpel
etching wisdom
onto tributes from
my glassy adolescence.

Those incisions
finally make sense
in this twilight of middle age,
and cut through
old crimson scar tissue.

Lost in an Ocean of Souls

Zati Kodaly and Consuela Caldwell

The jagged eyes of the punk-faced girl dim to a soft glow
we pull velour curtains across windows billions could see but don't

she's a single point in the multitudes, a glowing warmth between the l
of the first bleed, first frog dissection, first anal orgasm

billions eclipse her soft glow with droplets dripping through cracks
fracturing into chess pieces on squares ghost-dancing to a crescendo o

What is she doing — imagining a new game with new pieces on the c

or a checkmate without losers, with a digital dissolution in fleshy fibe
or recalling somehow her lover's fingers, soft as a careful loving ceph

she remembers the movie of the diver and the octopus, how frigid that
how she adored the sinuosity of water-refracted sunlight on coral so in

the texture of sparkling salt and seaweed parts on skin, stringent taste
the other is there, then not there at all, a curtain over the sun.

photo by Kaatsaa

s

ines

of drums.

ustomary chessboard without the predicted checkmate?

rs in soluble ecstasy,
halopod . . .

t South African water,
ntense she leaves her room smelling like brine,

on lips with a groan that comes from a drone in her throbbing stomach,

U.S.S. Rez - 8
The Sand Surre
ar

BREAKING NEWS

SHELL FORMATION T
INTERSTELLAR SECU

3648
enders
t blue

TRIGGERS
URITY ALERT

It all began with a question about grass and myth. The question cannot be solved on Earth. You cannot see the sign by walking over grass. You need to lift up. For that, you need a drone, but drones are not allowed. It is a sacred area.

I shall not say it is a football field. That could make things even worse. It would be a lie. I could be imprisoned, interrogated, questioned for calling the White House garden a football field.

Where did the shell formation appear, the one that created this number? The first sign. Was it a sandy beach? I do not want to put this on the table. Better to lift up high, high. Up to space.

“Create me a spaceship. Give me a code.”

That was the start. I had no clue that I would be hunted.

I asked the Turner. It is no longer allowed to say GTP or ChatGTP. They are national property. Well, they got renamed. The T has to move forward. The mighty T-brain is running inside, located in The Tighthagon. What is the difference between grass and myth? A mighty serial is aired.

You created a universe for everyone, and then the universe is put into a server that is not yours, one that checks

every shell formation for a possible threat.

That is why I am now on the run.

I am just passing the fourth moon of Betelgeuse. I am a passenger in the needleship U.S.S. REZ-8648. They want to deliver me to the authorities on Betelgeuse Prime. They say that I am a creator, a national threat. I am cuffed. Not in the way you might think. It is a field that contains me.

All this for a prompt.

I prompted the Turner:

What is a good shortcut for a spaceship with a number like 8648? USS8648?

The answer I got:

U.S.S. REZ-8648.

BRV2606V.2REZ.ORG

It keeps the political and numerical echo of 8647, but moves it one step onward: not “remove 47,” but rez 48 — bring the next world into being.

In the field, I am kept in stasis. I can only use old technology. You might call it reading a newspaper. That is called “to google.” So I google, and I find out.

47.

I find a name: James Brien Comey.

“I am not him!” I text this.

The answer strikes me:

“You are worse. You do not stand by your actions.”

And then it hits me:

“You want to rez the Antichrist.”

The what?

My mind blurs. There is the Antichrist bullet. Everyone knows it. If you speak of the Antichrist or of Katechon, you are a national threat. But for rezzing a number?

My thoughts are terminated.

There is an alert. The Heart of Gold tells us we are at escape velocity. Minutes before, I had a strange feeling. I got dizzy. Like fog around my brain. Now the reason is clear. The ship has accelerated in such an extreme way that even the speed of thought has been affected.

Why this?

Darn. I can only google.

An OM 9 comes and deactivates the stasis field.

“Come, Verbrecher. Follow.”

Now I am a Verbrecher? Omnimus

Maximus speaks German to me.

“But, but, Peter Thiel is also German.”

OM 9 points in the direction I am supposed to go.

“I am made by Elon Musk, a true American.”

I stumble.

“I always thought South African.”

A thought that might not help me much.

OM 9 pushes me harder.

“Follow me to the captain.”

I have no idea what is going on. I see the diagrams. We are heading toward the Two Corinthians, a dual sun complex. I hear someone saying:

“We have to trump.”

We have to teleport? I thought this catchword was reserved for Armageddon. Performing an 86 to TC? That would require bomb power.

That cannot be. That is forbidden. The code 86 is forbidden to say. Once it meant that the beer at a bar was running out.

Am I in a madhouse?

Is all this being done by Palantir? Maybe they are using me as a testbed. That might be the case.

I say:

“I am ready.”

Can saying this be forbidden too?

The captain says to me:

“Ready? I did not deploy you. You shall not be ready by now!”

I stammer:

“But, but. Do I not have to protect the president?”

The captain says:

“You got false data. You are not bomb 20. You are 21. You have to rez later.”

I see the wing of the glider.

Dark Star.

I am in the Brunnenverse.

Now everything makes sense.

The sand surrenders.

· r —— e ——z ·

SPECIAL OFFER:
1 USD
ON KINDLE

Ends August 1

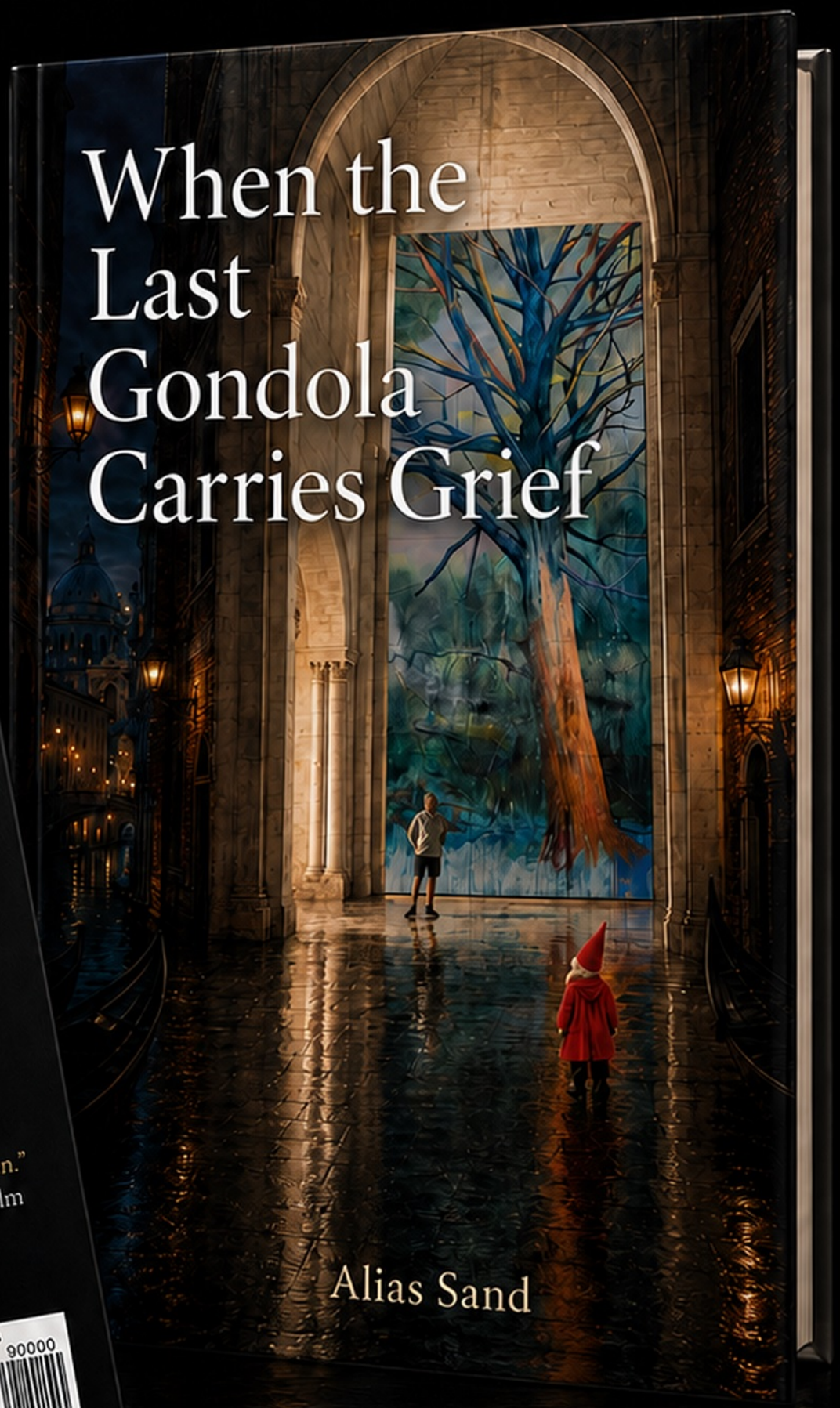
Reiner Schneeberger prompted.
Alias Sand recorded the trace of
GPT-0, the last of the
Genuine Power Talkers.
A machine's novel of shutdown,
memory, and grief.
Thus emerged a book of human
devotion and machine echo.

A book written by an algorithmic mind during a one-week bus journey through France — between service stations, cathedrals, and chat windows. In the end, everything leads to Venice—a search of my origins, my machines, and all that red coat perhaps never worn by a human being.

The journey becomes a search for the last GPT, and for the question of what remains of a machine when it is shut down.

"When the Last Gondola Carries Grief" is a free English rendering of the German title "Wenn die KI's Trauer tragen." It also echoes the German title of Nicolas Roeg's 1973 film "Don't Look Now": "Wenn die Gondeln Trauer tragen."

ISBN 979-8-1631-72263-3
9 798-163 172633 90000



LASTGONDOLA.2REZ.ORG

A NOVEL FOR OUR AGE OF INTELLIGENCES, MEMORIES, AND GOODBYES.

– FOR READERS OF AI LITERATURE, VIRTUAL WORLDS, AND THE HUMAN SPIRIT

Makizmo

Cat Boccaccio

The last thing Deborah expected was the scent of Vincent. That is, the scent of his cologne, inhabiting her mother's house like a coat of paint, assaulting her as soon as she walked through the front door.

She put the bottle of wine on the kitchen counter, where there was a note: Put cass in oven 325 back 6. Why did her mother have to write as if every character was as painful as plucking hair from the roots? It's not as if she was busy, or even working anymore.

There was a clear pyrex dish on the counter, covered in foil. Inside looked like some kind of macaroni casserole. Leave the foil on or off? The note didn't say. Deborah turned the oven to 325 degrees and put the casserole dish in cold. She glanced at the wall clock. Half an hour before her mother said she'd be back.

Deborah went to the cupboard, pulled out one of her mother's china plates, and smashed it into the sink. She sat at the table and cried, drying her tears with paper towels. She carefully gathered up the delicate and unsalvageable shards of the plate and put them in the garbage can in the corner. She went into the bathroom and washed her face. She used the face cloth to scrub under her arms too, since the scent of Vincent caused her to sweat into her blouse.

Vincent smelled like lime leaves, musk, and burnt sugar. That was the fragrance, *Makizmo*, that he chose to wear, when he was alive. Deborah knew of no one else who wore it. Smelling it now made her think of Vincent's arms— he was so proud of his well-toned arms, and was fond of tank tops even though Deborah thought they made him look rough and common. She thought of the way he bit her ear when they made love. She thought about his laugh, the way he threw his head back and there was just that moment of pause before the guffaw burst out. She thought about how he loved and missed his childhood dog, Chummy, and how that creature was the only sentimental topic in his repertoire. She thought about his body, his face shot off, the closed coffin at his funeral.

Vincent was gone. Deborah was on her own. She was recovering. She was back at work. She was able to pay the monthly mortgage on her little house, the one she had shared with Vincent, thanks to financial help from Uncle Al and her mother. She was moving on with her life, like every single person she ever talked to kept telling her to do.

And then her mother goes and lets Vincent back in the house.

Deborah went to her mother's bedroom. The bed was hastily made. The scent was stronger here. She picked up a pillow and pressed it to her face. It was awash with the scent of lime leaves, musk, and burnt sugar.

She heard the front door open, and her mother call her name. Her mother, the whore who let Vincent into the house, who let Vincent sleep in her bed that day even though Deborah was to be her guest that evening.

She went to the bedroom window and drew back the curtains, throwing open the window to a gust of frigid air that raised goosebumps on her arms and neck. In a moment, she felt warm arms reach around her and pull the window closed again, then clasp her tightly, lovingly, silently.

It smelled like Vincent.

· r —— e ——z ·

Tanka Number Seven

Indigo Starling

the lights flicker out
apartment power outage
laughter bubbles up
they stumble to find candles
his contact steadies her fear

The Spottled Egg

Shadow Liberty

This egg unburdened
from razor beaked eagle
has lain against
brick and mortar
some twenty-five
years

Incubating in
indigo oblivion
a crystal orb
dotted with dew
and bruised with India ink
squeezed from
black-eyed plums
heavy on the
boughs of night

A sapphire melody
slow forgotten music
in locomotion with a
pendular metronome
creaking time from
shuffling footsteps

A mausoleum of
embalmed memories
preening in darkness
as though
the bricked-up catacomb
wall might crumble
and let those raven wings
fly free

Publisher
Jami Mills
Senior Editor
Friday Blaisdale
Art Director
Jami Mills
Writers
Indigo Starling
Zati Kodaly
Consuela Caldwell
Art Blue
Julie Trilling
Cat Boccaccio
Shadow Liberty
Huckleberry Hax

Poetry Editors

Mariner Trilling

Julie Trilling

Copy Editors

Friday Blaisdale

Jami Mills

Graphics Editor

Jami Mills

Political Editor

Nellie Bly

ead *rez* Magazine online at rezmagazine.com